

Waste Reduction Ideas for Meetings and Conferences

This list of waste reduction ideas is intended to help you think of new ways to prevent waste and save money. Brainstorming with others is bound to result in more ideas. Let us know if you have other ideas!

Do It Right From the Start

- Plan for a low-waste event. Include waste reduction strategies in all parts and phases of the event.
- Select a facility that practices waste reduction; for example, reusable utensils, recycling, and buying recycled. Or select a facility that will work with you in achieving a “green meeting.”
- Make displays and decorations from used items and design them so they can be reused. Exchange decorations with other groups so they are “new.”
- Remind attendees to bring their own totes and have a few on hand for those who forget.
- Don’t release balloons into the environment—these create litter and harm wildlife.

Transportation

- Inform participants about public transportation alternatives for getting to the conference and around town once they arrive.
- Select hotels along public transportation routes.
- Arrange for carpools, including to and from airports or train stations.

All That Paper...

- Reduce the quantity of written material prepared. Don’t pre-stuff conference packets, let participants take the handouts they think they will use.

- Plan for what you need and avoid excess copies.
- Print or copy on both sides of pages.
- Use lighter weight paper.
- Remove duplicate names and out-of-date entries from mailing lists.
- Post agendas or program information instead of handing out individual copies.
- Use both sides of paper and poster board before recycling.
- Buy and use paper with at least 25 percent postconsumer recycled content.
- Collect paper used at the conference for recycling (white, mixed, newspaper, and other).
- Select reusable name tags if needed. Collect the tags at the end of the event and use them again.
- Avoid paper contaminants such as glossy/plastic coatings, metallic inks, plastic windows, and bright colors including goldenrod and adhesives.

Recycle

- Request that the facility set up recycling, or arrange for recycling yourself (contact local government for assistance).
- Provide clearly labeled recycling bins to collect paper, glass, plastic, aluminum cans, cardboard, and other locally recyclable materials.
- Place the recycling bins in convenient locations: meeting rooms, trade show floor, hospitality areas, lobby, corridors, registration area, loading dock, and the food service area.

Publicize Your Efforts

- Advertise the event as “green” and suggest attendees bringing their own mug and tote.
- Include a description of what was done to make the event green in any programs or agendas.
- Provide environmental educational materials. Post informational signs near recycling and composting bins to let people know what you are doing and why.
- Print or type “recycled content” on products with recycled content.

Time to Eat

- Select a caterer that practices waste reduction.
- When feasible, select a menu that eliminates the need for serviceware. For example, serve sandwiches, fruit, cookies, and other finger foods. When serviceware is needed use reusables, not disposables.
- Donate unserved food to a local food bank or homeless shelter.
- If possible, arrange to compost food scraps (no meat, grease, or dairy products).
- Use reusable table coverings, plates, cups, and utensils.
- If disposable cups are used, have everyone label their cup for reuse.

Purchase Less Waste

- Purchase products with no packaging, less packaging, or reusable packaging. Look for products in concentrate or bulk form.
- Request that deliveries be shipped in returnable containers. Ask vendors to take back packaging; some may be able to reuse it.
- Before recycling or disposing, try to reuse packaging materials. For example, cardboard and polystyrene may be used for art projects. Some mail companies can reuse packaging (check with Mail Boxes, Etc.).

Exhibits

- Ask exhibitors to reduce paper and packaging.
- Use reusable, recycled, and recyclable materials in exhibits.
- Print handouts on recycled and recyclable paper.
- Promote the use of reusable handouts.
- Recommend that participants pick up only what they need from exhibitors.
- Encourage exhibitors to reduce giveaways or only to give away items that are long lasting, useful, and made with recycled content.
- Provide collection boxes so people can return what they don’t want.

Reduce Use of Toxics

- Use only nontoxic cleaners and washable rags for cleanup and request that the facility and food caterer do the same.
- Print programs and other materials with vegetable-based inks.

For More Help:

- “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, It’s Good Business—A Guide for California Businesses,” 1994, California Integrated Waste Management Board, Pub. #500-94-004.
- Visit Waste Prevention World, www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WPW/.
- For information on how to prevent waste or for more business waste reduction assistance, call the Waste Prevention Information Exchange, (916) 341-6363.

CIWMB publications are available online at www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/ or by calling (916) 341-6306. If you have questions, information, ideas, educational materials, etc., please e-mail us at bzassist@ciwmb.ca.gov.

The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut energy costs, **Flex Your Power** and visit www.consumerenergycenter.org/flex/index.html.